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Mr T Hammond
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Hammond

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Planning for change: the impact of the new Key Stage 3 curriculum

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 05 November 2008 to look at work in planning for and implementing the new Key Stage 3 curriculum with particular reference to Year 7.

The visit provided valuable information which will contribute to our national evaluation and reporting. Published reports are likely to list the names of the contributing institutions but individual institutions will not be identified in the main text. All feedback letters will be published on the Ofsted website at the end of each half-term.

The evidence used to inform the judgements made included interviews with staff and students, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work and observation of four lessons.

The overall effectiveness of the planning for and implementation of the new Key Stage 3 curriculum was judged to be outstanding.

Achievement and standards

Standards on entry to the present Year 7 were below the national average. At this early stage of the implementation of the new Key Stage 3 curriculum, it is not possible to make a firm judgement on its impact on achievement, but the progress of the students observed in lessons was good.

- In recent years, the achievement of the students in the school has been improving at an accelerating rate and is good.
- Standards of speaking and listening observed in Year 7 lessons were above average and the students were making good progress in improving them.

- Students talked positively about their progress in lessons which they considered to be building well on their achievement in Year 6.
- The impact of the new curriculum on the students' enjoyment of their education is outstanding. They spoke enthusiastically about their learning and the support and challenge that they receive across the curriculum.
- Students eagerly participate in the wide range of clubs and societies which enrich their education well.

Quality of teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning in Year 7 is good.

- Lessons are consistently well planned across the school.
- Learning objectives are clear and helpfully referred to throughout the lessons.
- Lessons contain a good variety of tasks which are linked closely to the learning objectives and engage the students in their learning well.
- The pace of learning is brisk and purposeful, with plenty of opportunities for students to reflect on their progress.
- Teachers and teaching assistants provide focused support for those students who need help with their learning.
- Teachers have good subject knowledge.
- Activities ensure that students develop personal, learning and thinking skills as well as subject knowledge and skills. Students understand how these can be employed across the curriculum in their learning.
- Students learn how subject knowledge and skills fit into the wider dimensions of the curriculum.
- The behaviour of the students and their attitudes to learning are excellent, reflecting the good quality of the teaching and learning.
- Students of all abilities are encouraged to participate in lessons and consequently they make good progress and have confidence in their ability to succeed.

Quality of the curriculum

The quality of the new curriculum in Year 7 is outstanding.

- The new curriculum is well structured and builds successfully on the previous model.
- Students enjoy their learning. They effectively make links between subjects and between their academic and personal development.
- Specialist status in science and sport makes an outstanding contribution to the new curriculum, providing excellent models of approaches to learning.
- The curriculum is underpinned by the school's policy of enabling students to be 'Fit to succeed and fit to learn.' This ensures that students are taught subjects in the context of a better knowledge of the world around them, which prepares them excellently for their future lives.

- The curriculum is designed so that academic achievement is accompanied by excellent arrangements to promote the students' personal development and well-being.
- Good procedures help the students to settle into the secondary school well when they move up from Year 6.
- The curriculum makes an outstanding contribution to the local community. For example, the school runs a popular and successful family programme where parents and students participate in fitness activities together.
- Functional skills and personal, learning and thinking skills are taught well through humanities subjects in new programmes of study introduced this year. Although these skills are also well taught in other subjects, the school has not yet conducted an audit to ascertain whether all the skills are covered with equal effectiveness. Ensuring effective links between the work in humanities and other curriculum areas is at an early stage of development.

Leadership and management of the new Key Stage 3 curriculum

The quality of the leadership and management of the new Key Stage 3 curriculum is outstanding.

- The new curriculum is based on a strong and clear vision of providing an excellent all-round education which is structured to promote academic achievement, personal development and knowledge of the world. This provides a firm foundation for preparing the students for their future success at work, in society and in their personal lives.
- Excellent strategic planning has ensured that staff understand the new requirements, and that they have been fully involved in considering different curriculum models.
- National, local and school based training have contributed well to the shared understanding of the new curriculum.
- Excellent strategic planning has resulted in a new management structure which is carefully designed to provide leadership for different aspects of the new curriculum.
- Middle leaders have made a significant contribution to the design of the new curriculum in subjects and in ensuring that skills for life have been properly embedded into the programmes of study.
- The new curriculum at Key Stage 3 is clearly seen as part of a coherent and overarching strategy for the whole school curriculum.
- Procedures for monitoring and evaluating the new arrangements are rigorous and involve the whole staff and the student body.
- The capacity of leadership and management to make further improvements to the curriculum is outstanding.

Inclusion

The impact of the curriculum on inclusion is outstanding.

- The curriculum is designed to reflect the school's ethos of ensuring that all students are not simply included but are valued by the whole community.

- The curriculum is accessible to all students and tailored when necessary to nurture and promote the achievement of all groups and individuals.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- ensuring that all personal, learning and thinking skills are given equal weighting in the new curriculum
- linking the work in humanities subjects to other curriculum areas more closely.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop the curriculum in the school.

As I explained in my previous letter, a copy of this letter will be sent to your local authority and will be published on the Ofsted website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Andrew Harrett
Her Majesty's Inspector